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## Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2417, TFLE01: AOUN'S ADVISORS PROPOSE DIFFERENT PATHS

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06BEIRUT2417**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06BEIRUT2417</a>	<a href="#">2006-07-18 18:33</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Beirut</a>

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SUBJECT: TFLE01: AOUN'S ADVISORS PROPOSE DIFFERENT PATHS

SUMMARY

11. (C) While Michel Aoun's close advisor Gebran Bassil continues to defend Hizballah's actions (but with less energy than before), Aoun's other influential advisors MP Farid el-Khazen and MP Ibrahim Kanaan unambiguously stated to poloff that Hizballah deliberately started the current cycle of violence and will be held accountable by the people of Lebanon. While Kanaan was more moderate in his condemnation of Hizballah, el-Khazen pulled no punches. He said any cease-fire would be worthless unless it was accompanied by a commitment to disarm Hizballah of its heavy weapons and rockets, extend LAF authority to the Blue Line, exchange both Israeli and Lebanese prisoners, and return "the Lebanese territory of Shebaa." Unexpectedly, el-Khazen said the cease-fire should not be declared until Hizballah is weakened to the point where "it can turn to its Iranian masters and declare it had done all it could do." El-Khazen urged the US to restrain Israel from attacking Lebanon's LAF, Sunni, Christian and even Shia communities -- and to focus on Hizballah's military wing. While Bassil said that FPM leader Michel Aoun is most concerned with Israeli "aggression", both Kanaan and el-Khazen said the Aoun is looking for a way to be part of the solution, hopefully as part of a national unity government. End summary.

GEBRAN BASSIL -- STILL DEFENDING  
FPM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HIZBALLAH

12. (C) Gebran Bassil, senior advisor (and son-in-law) to Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun, met with poloff on July 17 to discuss a statement being released that afternoon by FPM leadership. Despite some points which would have been difficult to extract from FPM only a week ago -- most notably "support of the Government of Lebanon...and the right of the Government to extend its authority over all its territory" -- other provisions displayed a myopic view of the hostilities.

13. (C) When asked whether FPM would sever its past working relationship with Hizballah, Bassil bristled and commenced a strong defense of the joint communique of February 6, which in Aoun's view at the time, limited the ability of Hizballah to initiate independent action in Lebanon. Even with the obvious irony that the current crisis was started by Hizballah crossing the Blue Line on July 12, Bassil argued that if only the Siniora Government had followed the lead of Aoun last February, the current situation might never have developed. Bassil indicated that his thinking reflected General Aoun's.

MP IBRAHIM KANAAN -- VOICE OF REASON

14. (C) In a meeting on July 18, MP Ibrahim Kanaan, who said he had drafted the FPM statement of the previous day, sought to put the best possible spin on it. He said the inflammatory language ("Israel is destroying a country...burned land...destruction of vital areas") was a political necessity, but urged Washington to concentrate on the "breakthrough" language calling for the "government's sovereignty over all Lebanese territory."

15. (C) Kanaan also emphasized the statement's call for the parties to implement "all" UNSC resolutions. When questioned why the statement didn't specifically mention UNSCR 1559, Kanaan said such a citation would have severely undercut popular support for the initiative at a time of extreme tension.

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

¶6. (C) Kanaan, who professed to have sufficient influence with Michel Aoun to persuade him to steer a new course, said the political strategy with the best chance of success would be for Aoun, the dominant leader in Lebanon's Christian community, and the Siniora Government to work together -- both in reaching a cease-fire acceptable to all parties, and in the post-conflict political phase.

¶7. (C) Kanaan alluded to the influence of Gebran Bassil when he said that Michel Aoun listens to certain advisors

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more than others, but contended the General keeps an open mind to the views of all the factions in FPM and understands a radical change of direction is needed. Kanaan said he stands by ready to assist in facilitating this change.

MP FARID EL-KHAZEN

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¶8. (C) Late on the afternoon of July 18, MP Farid el-Khazen lost no time in excoriating the "irresponsible and duplicitous" nature of Hizballah's current course of action. He said he had recommended a complete severance of FPM's relationship with Hizballah. Like Kanaan, he recommended the formation of a national unity government -- as soon as possible -- to deal with the critical post-conflict phase. He argued that unless the pro-reform forces (of which he considers FPM to be a member) speak with one voice and demand immediate and radical changes, the country's leadership, with its propensity for delay and indecisiveness, will lose yet another opportunity.

¶9. (C) El-Khazen argued that any cease-fire between Israel and Hizballah had to be accompanied by a "roadmap" or it would be worthless -- and inevitably lead to instability and the eventual resumption of hostilities. He described four elements as essential:  
-- immediate exchange of Israeli and Lebanese prisoners  
-- immediate deployment of the LAF to the Blue Line  
-- immediate disarmament of Hizballah's heavy weaponry (particularly rockets)  
-- the "return" of Shebaa Farms to Lebanon

¶10. (C) He maintained that unless Shebaa Farms is returned and the "two or three" Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails are handed over, Hizballah would always be able to play the resistance card. El-Khazen said that without this card, Hizballah's leadership would be compelled to become a normal political organization -- or openly declare its identity as a Syrian/Iranian proxy.

¶11. (C) The most unexpected comment from this respected parliamentarian was his view that Hizballah's military capability must be "reduced" to a level where it could declare to its Iranian paymasters that it had done all it could do and must now accept the roadmap's provisions.

¶12. (C) MP El-Khazen, like his colleague Ibrahim Kanaan, believed that Michel Aoun was ready to work with his political adversary of the past year, MP Fouad Siniora. El-Khazen noted that Aoun and Siniora never had the "personal animosity" that characterized so many political relationships in Lebanon. "They now speak every day," he remarked, "nothing of real substance, of course, but the foundation is there."

COMMENT

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¶13. (C) While some who were once infatuated with Hassan Nasrallah now exhibit behavior similar to that of jilted lovers, Gebran Bassil is in denial. Bassil's logic -- that Siniora is to blame for the current conflict because he didn't embrace the February 6 Aoun-Nasrallah understandings -- is perverse. Even if Aoun's closest advisor (and son-in-law) doesn't see that Hizballah alone provoked this

calamity, some of Aoun's other, more temperate advisors do, as reflected in Kanaan and El-Khazen's comments. We suspect that many of Aoun's supporters also realize that the General was hoodwinked. Thus, we estimate that one of the losers in this current conflict is certainly Aoun. It will be interesting to see if his stupendous February 6 miscalculation causes him to evaporate as a political force in Lebanon, or whether he tries to recharger his political steam by building an alliance with Saad Hariri, Fouad Siniora, and the rest of the March 14 crowd he has disdained for so long. (The March 14 Christians, of course, are not so eager to open the door.) For our part, we are maintaining contact with his closest advisors, but letting the General alone. Virtually no one is visiting him these days, and that should give him plenty of time to think about the decisions he has made and needs to make. End comment.

FELTMAN